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## THE STATUS OF GREEK

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The waning interest in Greek as a staple subject of collegiate instruction is universally admitted by the apostles of culture as well as by the Philistines. The actual extent of this tendency, however, is perhaps scarcely realized even by the classicists themselves. The following results of an investigation made a few months ago may help to arouse the friends of Greek to the real situation, and to suggest the lines upon which the battle must be fought if the passing of the "noblest of the humanities" is to be prevented.

The investigation included twenty-two institutions of college grade in the following states: Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana.

Since the names of the colleges may not be given, a general summary of the results obtained must suffice. We shall present this summary under three main heads: I. Number of students; II. Obstacles to gaining and holding students; III. Greek courses in English.

I. As to the number of students taking Greek, the following facts were obtained:

1) Fourteen colleges have less than twenty Greek students each.

Two colleges have less than ten Greek students each.

Three colleges have large departments, ranging from ninety to one hundred students. In these three, however, special conditions obtain. In two of them Greek is still required for the A.B. degree, while the other has about eight hundred students, an exceptionally large percentage of whom are expecting to enter the ministry. It may be further stated that one-half or more of all the Greek students in these three institutions are in elementary Greek.

Aside from the three institutions just mentioned, only one of the

twenty-two colleges has thirty students in its Greek department. In this college, however, nearly two-thirds of the number are in elementary Greek, and only four are pursuing a fourth year. The investigation also revealed that in this institution Greek enjoyed the moral support of the president and faculty, a condition very rare in the West.

In addition to the two colleges previously referred to, only one institution still requires Greek for the A.B. degree, and in this instance the requirement has not resulted in a thriving department.

2) Ten colleges have no students pursuing a fourth year of Greek, four colleges have only one such student each, while six others have fourth-year classes ranging from two to five students. Thus twenty of the twenty-two colleges have either no fourth-year Greek class or else a very small one, while four institutions do not even secure any students for a third year.

3) Six colleges have no Greek students who began Greek in high schools, and nine others have only one or two such students. Only three of the twenty-two colleges have more than five students whose preparatory Greek was done in the high school, and in nine of the institutions considered, one-third to one-half of the Greek students did not begin the study until the Sophomore year or even later.

4) Seven colleges have had only from 5 to 10 per cent of Greek students in their graduating classes for the past five years; five others have had from 10 to 20 per cent. Even this low percentage, however, is really somewhat deceptive, for it is generally recognized that, for some reason which it might be interesting to consider, Greek students are more likely to continue their course until graduation than are other students. The reports also showed conclusively that the percentage of Greek students in the classes of 1910 was considerably below the average for the past five years. The exact figures on this point cannot be given, as several of the colleges did not report in detail.

5) In six colleges practically no Greek students are pursuing courses in college Latin, and in four others the percentage of such students is very small—not more than from 5 to 15 per cent. On the other hand, in fifteen of the colleges only 10 per cent, or less, of those who are specializing in Latin are taking Greek.

II. The chief obstacles to securing Greek students and to holding them for more than two years were stated somewhat as follows:

- 1) Greek not taught or encouraged in high schools.
- 2) The free elective system and the great multiplicity of elective courses.
- 3) The modern craze for the practical, interpreted by the "bread-and-butter" standard.
- 4) Ignorance and prejudice in home, high schools, and even in college faculties. (More than one college teacher of Greek gives as his reason for the difficulty, "the influence of my colleagues against Greek.")
- 5) The demand for short cuts and snap courses, and the common satisfaction with mediocrity.
- 6) The lack of students to inspire the teacher, making it difficult to interest the classes and to arouse a healthy competition.
- 7) The inherent difficulty of Greek and its disappearance from the high schools. Greek is not given an equal chance, especially with Latin and the modern languages.

III. Fifteen of the twenty-two colleges offer one or more Greek courses for English students, such as Greek literature in translations, Greek art, Greek history, Greek social life, and Greek mythology. The number of students in such courses ranges from five to twenty-five, but the most frequent number reported was about fifteen.

This report of the status of Greek in twenty-two of the representative colleges of the Middle West is certainly not very encouraging to worshipers at the shrine of Hellas. In spite of the awakening of classical teachers during the past decade, in spite of the fact that in most colleges Greek is being taught by improved and more vital methods, it seems almost impossible to hold college students for a fourth year of Greek. Indeed, fifteen of the twenty-two colleges considered have only three students or less in the third year of the language. However, the facts of the report, dark as they appear, serve to suggest the lines upon which we may work to effect an amelioration of the condition.

1. *A determined effort should be made to persuade the college teachers of Latin to take a more positive attitude in favor of Greek.* What is the situation? In many a Western college Greek finds Latin to be its most discouraging competitor instead of its friend and ally. Since Latin is taught in every accredited high school while Greek is found in but few, many high-school students are turned toward Latin and come to college with the purpose of continuing their study in the language. They are further attracted to specialize in it since it offers fair opportunities for high-school teaching. Moreover, the college Latin departments, in the effort to secure as many advanced students as possible, practically require prospective teachers to take so much Latin that it is almost impossible for them to take up Greek. Instead of positively influencing their best students to balance their classical preparation by a knowledge of the Greek language and literature, they often discourage this by demanding all the student's time in Latin, thus producing a narrow and one-sided teacher. It thus results, as the report shows, that only 10 per cent or less of the Latin specialists in fifteen of the colleges are taking Greek. Now the college teachers of Latin must be aroused to the fact that the cause of Greek is their own cause; that in the long run Greek and Latin stand or fall together; above all, that the teacher of Latin in the high school must be circumscribed and visionless in his teaching, indeed that he must fail to appreciate much in the literature, life, institutions and language he teaches, without a fair knowledge of things Greek. It should be needless to remind the teachers of Latin of the truth, already trite to them, concerning the intimate relation of Latin and Greek. It would sometimes seem, however, that they need such a reminder; and at any rate a brief statement of the facts may not be amiss for the uninitiate.

Greek and Latin have a multitude of root-words common to both languages. Their inflections are very similar, as is also much of their syntax. Without Greek the Latinist is utterly unable to explain or appreciate numberless points of etymology, syntax, and inflection, many of which demand explanation even in the teaching of elementary Latin.

But this is not all. Latin is largely a borrowed literature from Greek originals. Greek literature was the very breath of life to the Roman writers. Vergil had his Homer and Theocritus, Horace and Catullus their Greek lyrists, Cicero his Isocrates, Demosthenes, and Plato, Plautus his Menander, and so on throughout almost the entire catalogue of Latin authors. They were close students of Greek literary style. They imitated Greek models, and their imagination was kindled by a spark from the Greek fire. They copied Greek figures and idioms; appropriated Greek plots in epic and drama; employed Greek rhythms and meters; imitated Greek feeling in their lyrics; parroted Greek philosophy; accepted the Greek orators and rhetoricians as their masters. Indeed, every Roman classical writer drank deep of the "Pierian spring"; and this fact is so evident on almost every page of Latin literature that he who runs may read. Almost every Latin classic can be traced back to a Greek classic of greater genius.

In the face of such facts, what shall we think of a preparation for Latin instruction, even in the high schools, that does not take account of Greek literature, from which the Latin drew not only its inspiration but even the tools and materials for its product? What must be the limitation of that Latinist who cannot look beyond the Latin imitations to the Greek originals? Is it any wonder, when so many of our high-school Latinists are strangers to Greek literature, that much of their teaching is dead and visionless, a mere language-grind devoid of any quickening to the imagination?

But not only are Greek and Latin cognate languages; not only are Greek thought and style so interwoven into Latin literature as to make this often unintelligible without a knowledge of Greek; but the Greeks and the Romans had multitudinous points of contact in life, institutions, and history. Numberless references on the pages of the Latin classics are opaque to him who is a stranger to the civilization whose torch was the light of the Roman world. To prove this one need only turn the pages, haphazard, of any annotated edition of a Latin author. One will find explanatory references to Greek life, institutions, and ideas abundant everywhere.

It is high time, then, that the friends of classical learning begin to demand more unitedly and insistently that our instructors in

high-school Latin shall have at least a modicum of Greek. Every college teacher of Latin, both for the sake of self-preservation and for the sake of vital and intelligent Latin instruction, should insist that every prospective teacher in his department have at least two years of Greek as a prerequisite for a recommendation to teach Latin. Then not only would our college department of Greek be increased by the entrance of prospective Latin teachers, but many high-school graduates would come to college determined to seek out the fountain of Greek genius, whence their teachers drew their inspiration, and it would not be long before there would arise a new impetus to the teaching and study of the classics in the high schools.

2. *The friends of the classics should endeavor to secure for Greek an equal chance with the modern languages.* Under the present arrangement in most colleges Greek has almost no chance at all. The modern languages are so much easier that a student must be entirely unafraid of work in order to choose the much more difficult subject for the same credit. A much fairer method would be that, which is, I believe, in vogue in some institutions, of counting credits instead of hours as the requirement for graduation. Let all the courses of the curriculum be standardized in accord with a certain two or three studies accepted as fundamental. Then some studies, though given the same number of hours a week, will count more credits than others because of their inherent difficulty. Moreover, such a method would do away with one of the great evils of the free elective system—that of seeking after snap courses. Whatever may be said to the contrary, it is still a notorious fact that, by the very nature of the subject, some courses are necessarily harder and require more brain sweat than others, and this in spite of all that the instructor can do. For example, a course in Lowell's poems cannot possibly be made as difficult as calculus or philosophy; sociology cannot demand the time required for the mastery of a course in elementary chemistry; Spanish and French cannot, by any method known to man, be made as difficult as Greek. Indeed, most Greek teachers themselves are offering courses for English students which in no way compare in difficulty with the regular classical studies. The list of examples might be indefinitely lengthened and far more absurd comparisons might

be made, as, for instance, when courses in choral singing, athletics, or kitchen mechanics are given equal credit, hour for hour, with the most difficult courses in the curriculum. The elective system, with all its benefits, must continue to work great evils and unfairness, to students and teachers alike, until it is placed upon a rational foundation by some such method of standardization of studies as the one proposed. The superficial objection that such standardization would be impossible is the answer of the unprogressive and "stand-pat" teacher. Though it would doubtless involve many problems, yet there is no inherent reason why it should be impossible of attainment; and surely the present system should be odious to all college men who seek fairness or intellectual thoroughness.

3. *The teachers of Greek must conceive their subject in a far broader way than formerly.* They must realize that they are set to teach, not a language merely, but a literature and a life. Their business is to keep bright the flame of Greek inspiration in their own breasts and thus to kindle it in others. While conserving carefully the interests of thorough scholarship and linguistic attainment, they must steer clear of the rock of pedantry and mere dry-as-dust language grind.

It is a pleasure to note, as is indicated in the above report, that many of the teachers of Greek in the colleges of the Middle West have awakened to this need. Fifteen of the twenty-two colleges considered are offering courses in one or more phases of Greek civilization for English students; and though in many of the institutions such courses are still new and but meagerly attended, yet this is a step in the right direction. These courses are bound to grow in popularity and attendance, for Hellas has abundant wealth to offer all who are devoted to the ideal. They can, of course, never take the place of a first-hand knowledge of the Greek genius through the language itself. Yet in this day, when worship of the "bread-and-butter practical" has invaded even the temple of learning itself, it were well to dispense freely the diluted wine wherever there is no appetite for the unmixed draught. These courses will not turn the thoughts of students away from Greek and make them think that the study of translations and compilations is enough.



Rather will they open the eyes of the students to the existence of this wonderful civilization to which all modern life owes so great a debt. The students will realize inevitably, too, under competent teachers, the entire inadequacy of the translations and the necessity of a knowledge of the originals, if they would gain the key to unlock those doors of the treasure-house where the costliest gems lie hidden. Above all, giving such courses is sure to quicken the imagination and vitalize the teaching of the professors of Greek themselves, who too often in the past have permitted their great task to degenerate into a mere perfunctory exercise in translation and grammar.

These are a few of the points suggested by the results of the above investigation. Several others might well be considered; as, for instance, just what is the rational basis for giving Latin the preference in high school and college, when, as is generally conceded, Greek has so much more of intellectual wealth to offer the student. However, this and other questions of interest must be left for future consideration. Suffice it to say that the case of Greek is not yet closed, as the Philistines would have it; and it need not be, if only the friends of classical learning will sink all jealousies and get together in the determined attempt to attain such ends as are outlined in this paper.